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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0146
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0838
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0695
RUEHLU/AMEMBASSY LUANDA 0356
RUEHTO/AMEMBASSY MAPUTO 0387
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DAKAR 003179

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

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DEPT PLEASE PASS PEACE CORPS
USAID FOR AF/WRA
TREASURY FOR SONIA RENANDO
ACCRA ALSO FOR WARP
PARIS FOR POL - D'ELIA
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SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU: GOVERNMENT'S STEPS AND MISSTEPS
WITH DEADLINES UNMET AND STRIKES PROMISED

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Government budget and program presentation to the National Popular Assembly (ANP) has been postponed until January. The Supreme Court's decision on the constitutionality of President Vieira's naming Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister has also been delayed. The government workers and teachers unions promise to strike in January if back wages are not paid and work conditions improved. The ANP passed a "democracy tax" while the Prime Minister discounted the importance of municipal elections. Against this backdrop, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) plans to begin its parliamentary training program in January. END SUMMARY.

DEADLINES UNMET

¶2. (SBU) The government budget and program were to have been presented to the ANP by December 19 so that a vote could be taken by the end of the parliamentary session on December 21. Instead the Prime Minister requested that the ANP hold an extraordinary session between Christmas and New Year's Day, only to announce a few days later that the documents would be presented for ANP deliberations beginning January 9. By December 19, the Supreme Court was to have ruled on the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde's (PAIGC's) complaint concerning the constitutionality of the President Vieira's naming Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister. Vieira's lawyers, however, had not even presented their arguments by the Court's decision deadline. Vague promises to proceed and render a decision "by next week" were made. In what could be perceived as a threat to the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister stated, "There will be an earthquake in Guinea-Bissau if the Supreme Court cancels the presidential decree that appointed me to be the Prime Minister."

GOVERNMENT STEPS AND MISSTEPS

¶3. (SBU) In addition to the disturbing statement Gomes made about a negative decision by the Supreme Court, he also stated municipal elections "were not a priority" now because the country is in an "abnormal" political-institutional situation. He condemned the "extreme personalization" of politics in Guinea-Bissau while singling out former Prime Minister Carlos Domingos Gomes, Junior (Cadogo), stating he "pretends he is the leading politician in the country, but he is wrong."

¶4. (SBU) Meanwhile, the ANP President, Francisco Benante, continues to refuse to allow replacements for the six ANP members who joined the Cabinet (four PAIGC, one PRS, and one PUSD) to take their seats. According to Benante and his interpretation of parliamentary rules, the six could not be replaced because they had been suspended by their parties for joining the Forum de Convergencia de Desenvolvimento (Forum for Development or FCD). The Government wants the six seats filled because they need the votes to assure passage of the budget and program. A group of lawyers from the FCD is filing a suit with the Supreme Court over the constitutionality of Benante's position.

¶5. (U) The ANP managed to pass only one piece of legislation in the month-long session that ended December ¶21. Instead of relying on the international community for funding, the ANP passed a "democracy tax" meant to allow the Government to fund elections in Guinea-Bissau.

STRIKES PROMISED

¶6. (SBU) UNTG (the government workers' union) and

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Sinaprof (the teachers' union) have both announced strikes for January. UNTG claims the new work schedule puts an undue burden on employees who now have extra transportation and meal expenses associated with having to return to work in the afternoon after a 2.5-hour lunch break. The Government has still not managed to pay all outstanding teachers' salaries although the Minister of Finance has stated that all arrears will be paid before Christmas. In PolOff's discussions with the Presidents of both unions, they complained of the government's unwillingness to engage in dialogue and preference to rule by decree.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Some of the budget and program delays can be attributed to the holidays, but reluctance to make difficult decisions also seems be plaguing all three branches and to have put the brakes on the initial momentum the Gomes government had. Without the six votes that Benante is holding hostage, it is unlikely the Government would get the necessary majority for approval. The current political situation may deteriorate due to the inability of the various factions to attempt, let alone reach, any compromise. Instead of engaging in constructive dialogue and relinquishing any ground to the opposite side, the disaffected rush to the Supreme Court for a ruling to resolve differences. Mission is hopeful that NDI's parliamentary training program, which is scheduled to begin in January, may assist the ANP and civil society to focus on priorities and common interests. While the military is unlikely to intervene at this time, unless the political leaders in and outside the government can begin to work together and put personal differences and egos aside, it is not difficult to imagine dispute resolution by force of arms, as has been Bissau-Guineans' practice in the past. END COMMENT.

JACKSON